

**ELECTED LEADERS STRESS URGENCY OF ISSUE FOR FAMILIES FACING SEPARATION AND EXILE**

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**WASHINGTON, DC** – A coalition of Congressional leaders joined advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) immigrant families on Capitol Hill today to press for passage of an immigration reform measure which would end discrimination against the LGBT community. Members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Congressional LGBT Equality Caucus all expressed support for a legislative package which includes the Uniting American Families Act (UAFB) and the Reuniting Families Act (RFA). The UAFB and RFA include provisions to allow LGBT Americans to sponsor their foreign-born partners for residency in the United States.

Lawmakers joined Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), lead sponsor of the UAFB in the House of Representatives, and Congressman Mike Honda (D-CA), lead sponsor of the House RFA bill, at a Congressional press conference this morning. According to the Immigration Equality Action Fund, numerous LGBT binational families will face separation, or exile, if Congress fails to act on the bills this year.

“As the urgency for comprehensive immigration reform increases nationally, and the debate in Washington widens, it is essential to ensure that the LGBT community is included in the reforms we propose and pass,” Congressman Nadler said. “In particular, binational LGBT couples must be granted the right to sponsor their permanent partners for immigration, just as other committed and straight married couples can. To that end, I am joining a diverse coalition of legislators, advocates and LGBT groups calling on Congress to include my critical legislation -- the Uniting American Families Act -- in immigration reform, and to make sure that immigration reform is truly deserving of the term ‘comprehensive.’”

Honda, whose legislation addresses a number of obstacles faced by immigrant families, including LGBT families, added that, “With the Reuniting Families Act, we go further to realize American ideals. We do that by ensuring that all immigrants – irrespective of race, religion, and sexual orientation - are afforded the same rights and responsibilities as the immigrants who came before them, including a legal path to citizenship. We do that by reuniting families – spouses, children, siblings, parents, same-sex partners – who have been separated for decades. We do that by ensuring that families are included in comprehensive immigration reform. We cannot afford piecemeal approaches issue-by-issue or state-by-state, nor can we financially afford at the federal level the continued non-citizenship of 12 million undocumented immigrants. The President has called on Congress to address immigration reform, and I stand ready to heed that call and support an effort that is inclusive of LGBT families.”

Advocates for binational families praised Nadler, Honda and other speakers at today’s event for their call-to-action.

“Every day that Congress fails to take action, American families are separated or forced into exile, including more than 17,000 families raising young children,” said Rachel B. Tiven, executive director of the Immigration Equality Action Fund. “For those families, and their loved ones, today’s clear call to action, from key Congressional champions, could not be more welcome or more timely. We are proud to stand with those leaders, and with immigrants and their families across our country, in working to fix our broken immigration system. The LGBT community can be a steadfast partner in that effort, and Immigration Equality is proud to mobilize allies in support of inclusive immigration reform.”

Other lawmakers, from both chambers, also reiterated their strong support in statements issued today.

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), the Senate's lead sponsor for UAFA and Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, commended the House leaders for their support of the measure. "It is long past time to apply our immigration laws fairly to all persons," Leahy said. "The Uniting American Families Act strikes language from our immigration law that has a discriminatory impact on same sex couples. This pro-family measure should be included when Congress considers immigration reform legislation. Immigration reform will not be comprehensive if we do not make our laws fair for all Americans and their loved ones."

"Our immigration system must reflect the reality of our economy and society, and how we treat same-sex couples and families is just one example," said Congressman Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL), a member of the CHC. "We should modernize our laws to facilitate legal immigration so that we keep families together and individuals do not have to twist themselves in knots to conform to our outdated laws. Right now, too many same-sex, binational couples face an impossible choice: to live apart or to break the law to be with their partners, families, and children. That's not good for them and it is not good for the rest of us either. That's why I think the provisions of UAFA must be part of any comprehensive immigration reform bill."

"We are a nation of immigrants and, as a result, our diversity is our greatest strength," Congressman Jared Polis (D-CO) added. "Unfortunately, our out-dated immigration system contains laws that discriminate against LGBT families and hinder our economy, our diversity, and our status as a beacon of hope and liberty to people across the world. To be truly comprehensive and achieve real, long-lasting reform, we must provide all domestic partners and married couples the same rights and obligations in any immigration legislation."

Illinois Congressman Mike Quigley also praised the effort. "Immigration equality must be a lesson in inclusion, rather than an exercise in division and comprehensive reform must live up to its name by truly including everyone," said Quigley. "Our march in the direction of progress and justice for families across this country cedes its moral high ground unless we say to LGBT families that this is their movement, too."

A group of 37 immigration, LGBT, faith and civil rights organizations issued a joint statement today, also praising the lawmakers and calling for passage of an inclusive immigration reform package. The complete statement is available at [www.immigrationequalityactionfund.org](http://www.immigrationequalityactionfund.org).

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*Immigration Equality Action Fund advocates on Capitol Hill for equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and HIV-positive immigrants and their families. To end discrimination in U.S. immigration law, Immigration Equality Action Fund works to pass the Uniting American Families Act and LGBT-inclusive Comprehensive Immigration Reform. The Action Fund lobbies legislators and other policy makers, builds coalitions, and empowers LGBT immigrant families around the country to fight for change.*